**Revenge of the Fallen**

Matthew 5:38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ **39**But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. **40**And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. **41**And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. **42**Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. (ESV)

In this part of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses yet another command that the people have heard from the Law. This command is “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” which means that the punishment should fit the crime. If a man knocks the tooth out of another man out of vengeance the man who committee the act should also have his tooth knocked out as consequence. This command is actually found in the Old Testament law in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. God actually commanded this in the Old Testament. But it has to be understood, this punishment was to be taken out on a governmental scale; the judges and magistrates were to issue the consequences. The leadership was to determine the crime and then deliver fitting consequences upon the person.

But many others took this command as a means to issue their own consequences upon a person. Say a person gave them a black eye. The person with the black eye would then attempt to give the other person a black eye as well. If someone publicly shamed them, they saw fit to return the favor. They would retaliate. Another word we use for this is REVENGE

And who wouldn’t want to take this passage as a license to get revenge? That is just the thing: The desire for revenge is a part of our nature because sin is a part of our nature. We are constantly looking for ways to get back at people when they wrong us. Even if we never truly do act on those desires, we often consider what we would do or would like to do if given the chance to get someone back for the way they wronged us.

At face value most people take this passage to mean that pacifism altogether should be the way of the Christian. A Christian should not fight, defend or stand up for what’s right because it means we might have to “resist evil” as Jesus says not to do, but that is taking the passage way out of context even if it appears that way on the surface. Some people say defending your family from an attacker is wrong because Jesus said, “Do not resist evil”. They think turning the cheek, sitting back and letting the hurt happen is the way to go about things. Some say that government should not fight other governments over atrocities in the world. But this is a fundamental misunderstanding Jesus’ words.

Jesus here is speaking to people—He is speaking to individuals. He is concerned primarily with how we respond to actions taken against us—actions taken oneself. Jesus does not say ”If someone slaps your wife” or “If someone steals from your friend”. He says, “If someone slaps YOU” YOU—He is talking about YOU. What should your response be when someone wrongs you? You can’t go very long in this world without being hurt by someone else, so how are you going to respond when that time comes? You can’t go most days without someone hurting you, saying something unkind, or offending you. How will you respond. We should always respond with the way of Jesus. Now is the perfect time to ask that question “What would Jesus do?”

Jesus uses three examples to demonstrate what our attitude should be when people wrong us. First, He uses the physical example of someone slapping you. He says to “turn the other cheek” which means to take the hit—even let that person hit again—but do not hit back. The second example He uses is that of someone taking your stuff. He simply says to let it happen—even let them have more than they demand at first. The third example is that of someone forcing you to do something such as carry their bags. This is where the phrase “Go the extra mile” comes from.

But how difficult we find it to do what Jesus says here, because we so often cling to our rights. “Well I should have the right to hit back if he/she hit me”. We think it’s our right to get revenge and to retaliate against unjust action taken against us. If you don’t think we have a problem with revenge take a look at how many movies in Hollywood have the hero taking revenge on others who wronged them. It is so natural of us to want to fight back—to want to even the odds—to want to right someone’s wrongs. But that is the problem: when our desire is to get revenge it is because we are only thinking about ourself. Revenge only thinks about itself. It doesn’t think about consequences, other people, or even what’s right. It only thinks about self. And that is what Jesus desires we get away from: this obsession with SELF. SELF is what drives us to react rather than respond. SELF is the great enemy of our life and faith. The greatest enemy is not the devil or demons, but SELF. SELF drives us to do things demons don’t. The devil is not always leading us to sin—He is not everywhere you are, but SELF is everywhere you are.

It is selfish to get revenge. It is selfish to retaliate. And what is selfish is Un-Christlike. Replace that word “selfish” with the word “Un-Christlike” in any sentence and the statement remains true. We are called by Jesus here not to consider ourselves and what we want or desire most in response to an offense against us, but rather what is right. When someone steals from us, or hurts us, or offends us we have got to look past the harm that has been done to ourselves, not seeking after revenge. One reason we can put aside self and not retaliate when hurt is because we have the promise that God will one day punish the wicked for their deeds.

Romans 12:19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (ESV)

We don’t need to seek revenge because any punishments or retaliation the offender deserves will be dished out by God one day. This is not the same concept as Karma. We as Christians don’t believe in karma. We don’t believe the universe repays evil deeds with evil or good deeds with good things. We believe that God alone determines judgement—sometimes He forgives for sin when a person puts faith in Him. But we can have full confidence that if a person wrongs us the Lord sees that. We have no right to repay evil deeds with evil—only God reserves that right, even when we feel as though we do. Yet another reason it is so wrong to seek revenge is because it only makes matters worse.

*“But when evil meets no opposition and encounters no obstacle but only patient endurance, its sting is drawn, and at last it meets an opponent which is more than its match.”-Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Evil fought with evil only reproduces, but when evil is met with good it cannot grow. We are not to be evil producers, but evil destroyers. We are Christians, and to be Christ-like means to not look out for ourselves, but for others first. As believers we are without rights—slaves to Christ Jesus